

977.3

St4j

1969

STEVENS

JAMES WATSON WEBB'S TRIP
ACROSS ILLINOIS IN 1822




LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

977.3

St 4j

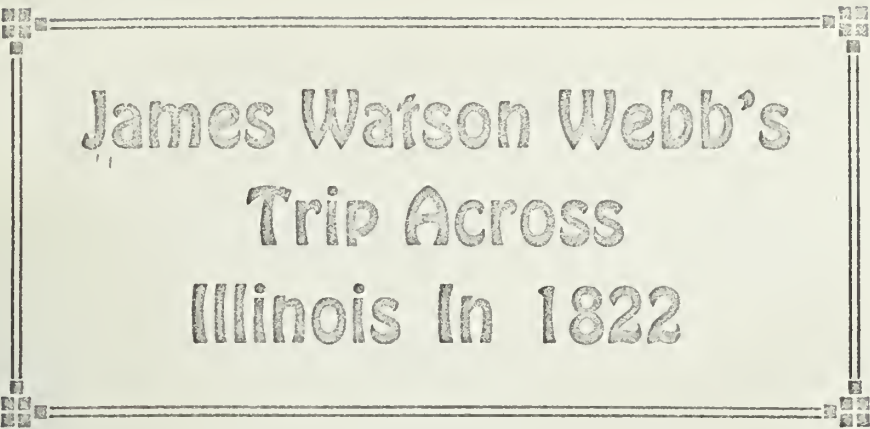
1969

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

<http://archive.org/details/jameswatsonwebbs00stev>



James Watson Webb's Trip Across Illinois In 1822

FRANK E. STEVENS



977.3
St 4j
1969

Miss Helen Conway

TO MY FRIEND
Herbert M. Fay

Miss Helen Conway

11



GENERAL JAMES WATSON WEBB

James Watson Webb's Trip Across Illinois in 1822

FRANK E. STEVENS.



HE ride across the bleak prairies of Illinois, made in February, 1822, by James Watson Webb, a young lieutenant then stationed at Fort Dearborn, may never reach the fame attained by the ride of Paul Revere, in April, 1775, because, perhaps, no Longfellow will ever appear to immortalize it. Certainly we may never hope for assistance from the academic historians, for the reason, so far as the record speaks, none of them appears to know anything about it. And so the effort to bring into notice a bit of Illinois history, quite as important and far-reaching in consequences to the west as Revere's ride was to the east, must be made by the amateur historian.

Webb himself subsequently achieved fame as a public man, and were it not for his modest printed narrative of this ride, it would indeed be lost to Illinois.

Born at Claverack, Columbia County, New York, February 8, 1802, at 17 he entered the army and was stationed in New York harbor. As he says of that part of his service: "After reporting for duty—a boy of seventeen—sixty days of military duty in this harbor were quite sufficient to give me a surfeit of city garrison life, and to revive in me the earliest promptings of my boyhood—a desire to visit the unknown regions of the great West; to hunt and shoot where the Indian alone had disturbed the game; to angle in the streams where the line of the white man and the disciples of the wily Walton had never tempted their finny inhabitants; and to roam with the aboriginal savage, his native forests; to see him in his native grandeur and to know him as he was and is, when uncontaminated by contact with that civilization, of which he is certain to imbibe all that is vicious, while it fails to impart to him, in return, any of its blessings."

In the autumn of 1819, Webb found himself in Detroit, but desiring to remove himself still closer to Indian life, he secured a station at Chicago, in the winter of 1821-22, which made it possible to make the ride mentioned in these pages.

The inspiration, which caused him to reduce the adventure to paper, arose from acquaintance with an English half-pay officer, formed in 1832. This officer was just as eager to see Indian life in its primitive state as Webb had been, and, largely through Webb's influence, the officer found himself enabled to plunge into the wilderness. Subsequently the officer reduced to manuscript form, a narrative of his adventures. Webb edited this manuscript and attended to its publication by Harper Brothers, in 1846. The book is entitled, "Altowan, or Incidents of Life and Adventure in the Rocky Mountains, by an Amateur Traveler. Edited by J. Watson Webb. In two volumes."

In the dedication of this work, to Charles Fenno Hoffman, Webb men-

tioned certain influences characteristic of the Indian, which brought out his story:

* * * * "How far the instincts of our nature, and the senses of hearing, seeing, and smelling, are affected, or even changed, by civilization, is a question which still remains to be decided; and in relation to which, you and I possess facts that are not only startling in themselves, but which warrant a closer research on the part of the curious in such matters. I will relate an instance, which came under my own observation, and which to this day I have never been able to explain, except on the hypothesis that the senses given to man in his native state, being less necessary for him in the artificial life which civilization has substituted, they greatly degenerate; and consequently, that the vision, the hearing, and the sense of smelling in the Indian are so much more acute than in civilized man, that we frequently are disposed to attribute to instinct what, properly speaking, is simply the habitual exercise of these senses, as originally bestowed by the Almighty.

"In the winter of 1821-22, I was stationed at Chicago, then about 150 miles in advance of the pioneer settlers. All west and north of us, with the exception of the old French settlements at Green Bay and Prairie du Chien, was untrodden wilderness, or trodden only by the lords of the forest, and the adventurous trapper and voyageur. A short time previous, the fifth regiment of infantry, under the command of Colonel Snelling, had established itself on the upper Mississippi, at the falls of St. Anthony. Early in February, 1822, the principal chief of the Potawatomes, one of the most friendly tribes west of Lake Michigan, reported to the Indian agent (Kinzie) at our post, that his tribe had received an invitation from the Sioux Indians to unite with them in cutting off the garrison at St. Peter's, at the Falls of St. Anthony; and, as evidence of his truth, produced the tobacco, said to have been sent to them by the Sioux, and which generally accompanies such propositions for a war league. As no doubt was entertained of the truth of this report, the commanding officer directed me (the adjutant) to make an arrangement with some of the voyageurs connected with the Indian trading house near the fort, to carry the intelligence to Fort Armstrong, situated on Rock Island, in the Mississippi, near the mouth of Rock River, thence to be forwarded to Colonel Snelling. They, however, refused all my offers, alleging that none of them had ever crossed the country in the winter season, that it was impracticable, etc., etc.

"The same love of adventure and excitement which had induced me to exchange a station in this city (New York F. E. S.) for Detroit and then from an artillery into an infantry regiment, added to a conviction that the lives of a whole regiment of officers and men, their wives and children, were in jeopardy, and that it was possible to avert the impending blow, induced me to volunteer to be the bearer of the intelligence to Fort Armstrong.

"I accordingly took my departure, accompanied by a sergeant, who was a good woodsman, and an Indian, of my own age. The first two or three days were days of weariness to me, and of frolic and fun to the Indian; because we necessarily traveled on foot, in consequence of the extreme severity of the weather, with our provisions on a pack-horse, and a horse to break the snow

and make a trail in which to walk. The actual suffering consisted in riding our regular tour; but I, being 'all unused' to travel through the snow on foot, for hour after hour consecutively, was weary and worn out when we came to bivouac at night; while the Indian was apparently as fresh as when we started, and cracked his jokes without mercy, upon the fagged Che-mo-ca-mun or 'Long Knife,' as they denominated all whites. I found, however—as I had been told by those who were learned in such matters—that endurance of the Indian bears no comparison with that of the white man. He will start off on a dog trot and accomplish his eighty or a hundred miles in an incredible short space of time; but when he comes to day after day of regular work and endurance, he soon begins to flag, and finally becomes worn out; while each succeeding day only inures the white man to his work, trains him for further exertion, and the better fits him for the following day's labors. Thus it was with my Indian and myself, and on the evening of the fourth day, I came to camp fresh as when we started, while the Indian came in weary and fatigued, and, of course, it was then my turn to boast of the endurance of the Che-mo-ca-mun and the effeminacy of the 'Nichenawby.'

"My instructions were to employ the Potawatomie, as a guide to the Rock River, where the country of the Winnebagoes commenced, and then take a Winnebago, as a guide to Fort Armstrong—the leading object being so to arrange our line of travel as to avoid the prairies, upon which we would necessarily suffer from the cold. I had been apprised that I would find an old Canadian voyageur, residing with his Indian family, in a trading hut on Rock River, and it was to him my Potawatomie was to guide me.

"Toward evening, on the fifth day, we reached our place of destination, and old La Saller, recognizing us as whites and, of course, from the fort, intimated by signs, as he conducted us to the loft of his hut, that we were to preserve a profound silence. All who live in the Indian country learn to obey signs, and it is wonderful how soon we almost forget to ask questions. I knew that something was wrong, but it never entered my head to inquire what it was—Indian-like, quite willing to bide my time, even if the finger, closely pressed upon the lips of the old man, had not apprised me that I should get no answer until it suited his discretion to make a communication.

"It was nearly dark, when we were consigned to the loft of the good, old man, and for three long hours we saw him not. During this period there was abundant time for meditation upon our position; when all at once the profound stillness, which reigned in and around the hut, was broken by the startling sound of a Winnebago war dance in our immediate vicinity! This, as you may imagine, was no very agreeable sound for my sergeant and myself, but it was perfectly horrifying to my Potawatomie; all of which tribe, as also their neighbors, were as much in awe of a Winnebago as is a flying fish of a dolphin. But all suspense has its end, and at length the war dance ceased—the music of which, at times, could only be likened to the shrieks of the damned, and then, again, partook of the character of the recitative in an Italian opera, until at length, it died away and all was silence.

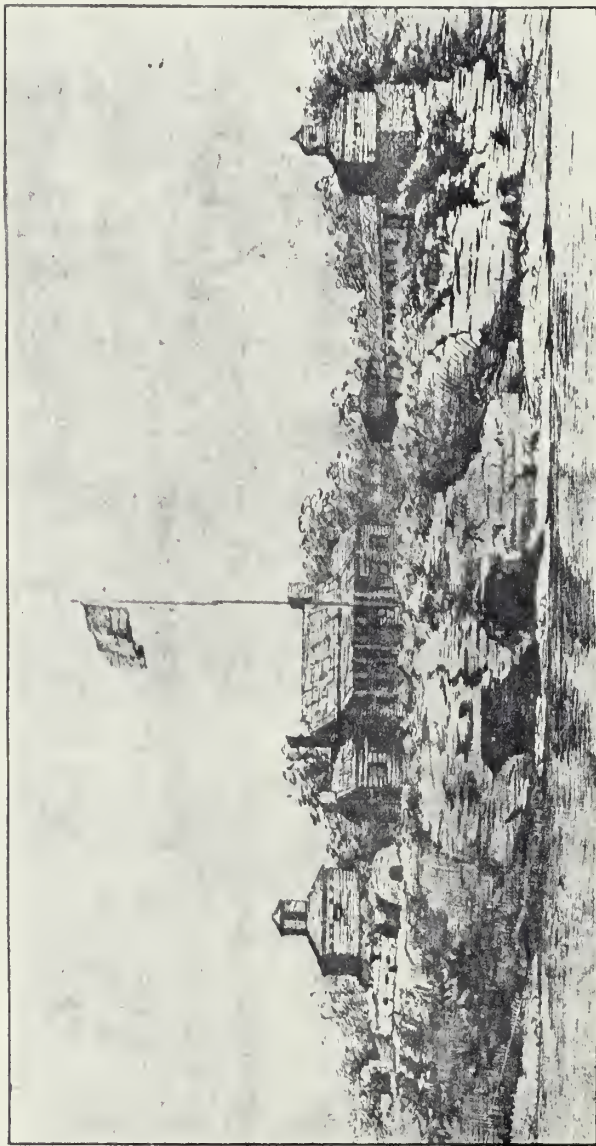
"Then came old La Saller, whose head, whitened by the snows of eighty winters, as it showed itself through the trap in the floor, was a far more

acceptable sight than I could have anticipated it would be when I left the fort. Having been informed who we were, and my desire to procure a Winnebago to guide me to Fort Armstrong, he inquired whether we had not heard the war dance, and if we could conjecture its object! He then proceeded to state that two Winnebagoes, who had been tried, and sentenced to be executed, for the murder of a soldier at Fort Armstrong, had escaped from the jail at Kaskaskia, and arrived on the river a few days previous; that in consequence the whole nation was in a state of extraordinary excitement, and that the war-dance, to which we had listened, was preparatory to the starting of a war party for Fort Armstrong to attack it, or destroy such of the garrison as they could meet with beyond its palisades; and that, of course, our only safety was in making an early start homeward. I inquired whether I could not avoid the Indians by crossing the Great Prairie, and thus striking the Mississippi above the fort. He answered that, by such a route, I would certainly avoid the Indians until I reached the vicinity of the Mississippi; but that we would as certainly perish with the cold, as there was no wood to furnish a fire at night. The mercury in the thermometer, as I well knew, had stood at five degrees below zero when I left the garrison, and it had certainly been growing colder each day; and therefore I apparently acquiesced in his advice, and requested to be called some three hours before daylight, which would give us a fair start of any pursuing party, and bade him good night.

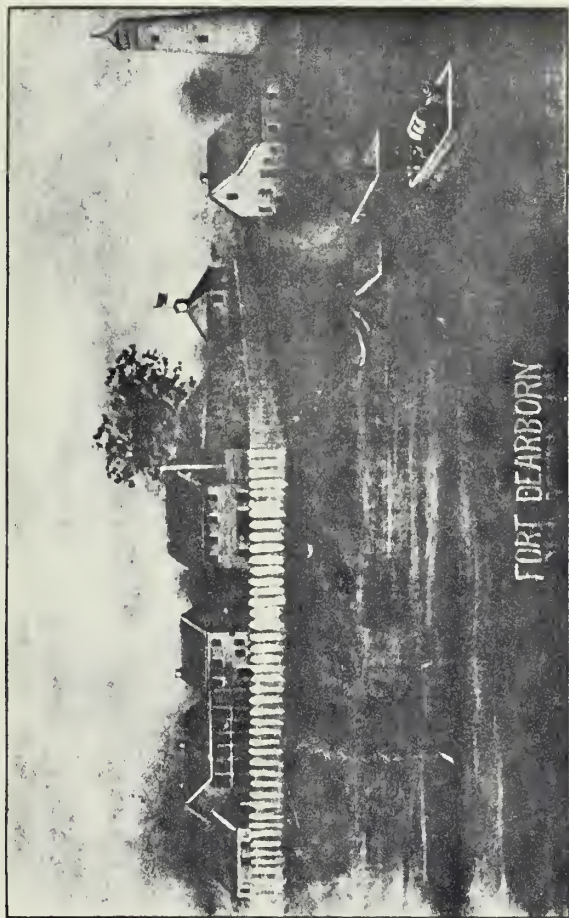
"But the old man doubted my intention to return to the fort, and shortly after, paid us another visit, accompanied by a very old Winnebago, who avowed himself the firm friend of the whites, and proceeded to point out the folly of any attempt to proceed in my expedition. He inquired its purport, and when I told him it was to visit a dying friend, he said I had better postpone the meeting until after death, when we would doubtless meet in the Paradise of the white man! but, at the same time, gave me to understand that he did not believe such was the object of my visit to the banks of the Mississippi. Indian-like, he sought to pry further into my affairs, but expressed his respect for all who knew how to keep to themselves their own counsels, and the counsels of their government. His remarks were kind and in the nature of approbation for the past and advice for the future, and coming from such a source, made a lasting impression.

"Again we were left to ourselves, and then doubtless I wished myself safe in garrison. But to return, and that too from fear, and the object of my journey unaccomplished, was inevitable disgrace. But what was still more important, was the consequence to others of my return. I could not but think there was an understanding between the Winnebagoes and the Sioux, and if there had lingered in my mind a doubt of the story of the Potawatonic chief, that doubt was now at an end and, of course, a sense of duty to a whole regiment of officers and men, their wives and children, was as imperative in requiring my advance, as was the fear of disgrace in forbidding my return. With two such motives for a right decision, there could be no doubt as to my course. It required more courage to retreat than to advance, and I determined upon the latter.

"Some hours before dawn of day, we started, apparently for garrison;



FORT ARMSTRONG



FORT DEARBORN

but once out of sight of old La Saller we knocked the shoes off our horses, to avoid being traced by them in crossing the river, threw away our caps, tore up a blanket to make the hood worn by Indians in extreme cold weather, and took a course by the stars, directly west. I should have mentioned that my Indian, now having become valueless, I urged his return to his own tribe. But neither persuasion nor threats could induce him to go. In every bush he imagined he saw a Winnebago, and he dared not return alone. I then urged, what was quite apparent would be the fact, that he could not sustain the forced march, to which we were destined, and upon which our safety depended. But it was all in vain, and I was compelled to take him with us.

"And now, after this long introduction, I come to the point of my story. The second day, after leaving Rock River, was the coldest I ever experienced. The ground was covered with about eight inches of snow and no one who has not experienced it, can well imagine with what piercing effect the wind passes over those boundless fields of snow, unbroken by a single tree. On that day, at Fort Armstrong, sixty miles south of me, and sheltered by woods, I afterward ascertained, the mercury never rose above fourteen degrees below zero! How cold it was where we were, it is impossible to conjecture; but I know that when my Indian failed in strength and absolutely refused to take his turn in riding the horse to break a trail through the snow, I rode his tour of ten minutes, in addition to my own, and when I got down, discovered that my feet, face, hands and knees were frozen!

"To encamp without wood was an impossibility. The country is a high, rolling prairie, and from a naked hill, about five o'clock in the afternoon, I discovered an island of woods, lying southwest of us and distant some ten miles. When the Indian saw the distance yet to travel, the hope with which I had all along cheered him failed, and he announced his utter inability to proceed. To place him on our horse was certain death to him; to remain with him in the prairie, without wood and consequently without fire, was as certain death to all; yet he begged most piteously that we would not abandon him! He was but a boy, and, although even at that age, he might meet death at the stake with all an Indian's coolness, he could not make up his mind to a death from fatigue and cold. I reasoned with him upon the folly of all perishing, in an idle attempt to save one, pointed out the wood to him and promised him to build a large fire to guide him to us as soon as we reached it, and, with a heavy heart, took leave of him with but little expectation of seeing him again.

"Night set in shortly after we separated, and not a solitary star was visible; but our course to the wood lying south west, and the wind blowing cuttingly severe from the north west, there was but little difficulty in keeping our way. In about an hour the wind lulled and then we felt the awkwardness of our position. On a trackless prairie, covered with snow, without trail, moon, star or wood—what evidence did we possess that we were going in the direction we desired? The reflection was not a comfortable one, but we knew the worst of our position. We could but wander at random all night on the prairie and find our way to shelter in the morning; but not so our

poor Indian; and with the lulling of the wind, the last gleam of hope for him was necessarily abandoned.

"This calm may have continued nearly two hours, when again the wind rose; but instead of blowing upon our right cheeks it struck us upon the left. That the weather had not moderated, we had too much reason to believe, and consequently we came to a halt, lighted our spunk, held it to my pocket compass—and, behold, we were traveling north east, or directly from, instead of to, our haven of rest! This created no surprise, though, of course, we were not particularly pleased to discover that we had lost so much time on such a night, in the wilderness of prairie with which we were surrounded; but life in the wilderness is a life of action. We promptly resumed our march in the proper direction, with the wind a certain guide, if it did not again lull. And now comes the wonder. In less than half an hour, we overtook our Indian, traveling leisurely, in the same direction as ourselves! Never before nor since, have I been so surprised. My salutation was, 'Where are you going?' He answered, 'To the woods.' 'And how do you know that you are going to the woods?' He could not tell how, or why, he knew he was right, but he was certain—had not a doubt. I then undertook to question him more closely, but it was of no avail. He knew not why it was, but he was as perfectly certain that he was traveling in the right direction, as if it had been broad daylight, and the wood directly in view. He had traveled slow, was somewhat refreshed, and we all traveled leisurely until about ten o'clock at night, when we reached our anxiously sought wood, built a fire, scraped away the snow for a couch and slept, as only travelers under such circumstances can sleep.

"Now comes the question, and it is one which has bothered me for 24 years—how did the Indian avoid losing his way? Why was he confident that he was going directly to his place of destination? My sergeant, an old woodsman, and myself had made use of all our experience, judgment and intellects, to keep in the right direction, but had failed, had wandered, no one can tell where, and yet this child of the forest, without a trail, in a dark night—without a moon, star or wind to guide him, and quite ten miles from the wood—had never for a moment doubted that he was in the right direction; in short he knew that he was, and the result demonstrated his knowledge. Whence came this knowledge? Was it instinct? or was he indebted for his knowledge and safety to his keener sense of smelling?

"You once said to me, that a critical examination of Indian skulls had led a friend to believe that the orifice, through which the olfactory nerve passes, is larger than in the white man; that the eye is set differently, so that he may see farther behind him than civilized man, and that the passage for admitting sound into the head, is larger. If this be so, the secret of my Indian's knowledge is at once developed; and we cannot but be struck by the wonderful and inscrutable provisions of a kind Providence for all His creatures, in whatever condition in life they may be placed. That man, in a civilized state, does not require so perfect a use of his senses, as in a state of nature, is very evident, and, although the Almighty may have formed us all alike, it is not impossible that civilized man has lost—because of his artificial state, no longer neces-

sary for his safety—much of his delicacy of smell, power of vision, and acuteness of hearing; while the Indian, dependent upon those senses for safety and subsistence, has not only retained them in all their original perfection, but by constant exercise, increased their powers beyond our comprehension of what is possible. Such, at least, is the theory I have adopted to explain the incident related.

“In regard to the result of my expedition, I ought to add, that most providentially, we reached Fort Armstrong without meeting with an Indian, or approaching sufficiently near to one to be recognized as whites, although we passed for miles (unconsciously) through woods filled with them, and were informed, on reaching the fort, that for some weeks, the main land had not been visited, unless accompanied by a strong guard. My dispatches were forwarded to the Falls of St. Anthony, by soldiers, who traveled all the way on the frozen Mississippi, and fortunately, when they were received, a number of Sioux chiefs were about the garrison. They were immediately placed in the guardhouse, and others sent for, and served in like manner, and none of them was released until after the opening of spring, and satisfactory proofs, that the proposed rising had been finally abandoned as equally dangerous and hopeless.”

For locating Webb's trip homeward, we are indebted to Blanchard's historical map, and he, in turn, was indebted to a correspondence carried on with Webb, before that person died. In this map we find that Webb traveled directly south from Fort Armstrong, until he reached a point in Mercer county, due west from Hennepin. From this point he went easterly to Hennepin. As there was no Hennepin in 1822, I was at a loss to learn why Hennepin was marked, and why the mark ended there.

In desperation, I picked up the autobiography of Gurdon S. Hubbard, arranged by his nephew, Henry E. Hamilton, and found, on page 44, these words: “Opposite the mouth of Bureau River, and about a mile above the present site of the town of Hennepin, our first trading post was located, and placed in charge of Mr. Beebeau, who, for many years, had been a trader in that region.” And I am inclined to believe Mr. Hubbard was there when Webb reached the place on his return trip, because, on page 116, Hubbard says: “About ten days after reaching the above settlement, I received orders from Mr. Deschamps, to vacate my post and join the brigade at Beason's Post.” Afterwards, in April, the trip for Mackinaw was begun.

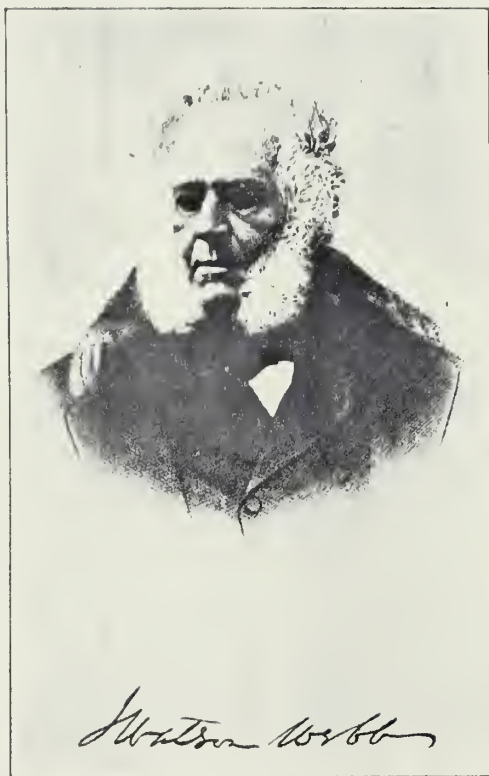
On page 110, he mentions a turkey hunt at Bureau Post. Later an Indian tried to murder him, (page 113). Page 111, he had just finished his house, and in April (page 116) he left the post for Mackinaw. That would have found him at Bureau Post, from November, 1821, to April, 1822, I am sure. He went north, and the next date met (on page 125) is March, 1823.

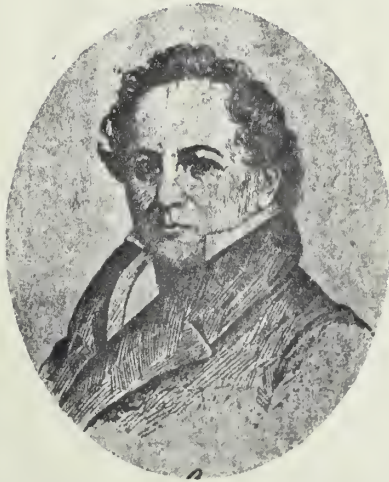
From Bureau Post, Webb followed the well-beaten trail up the Illinois and Des Plaines rivers, and reached Chicago duly.

For Webb's brief excursion into a psychological side line, we, of northern Illinois, should be thankful, although disappointed that he did not go into life at Fort Dearborn more extensively. Just a few pages about that period would be of inestimable value to us today; wherefore to know more of him

and his career, we must turn to others, who in writing of him, give his Fort Dearborn life attention so scant as to appear almost spiteful. At 17 he ran away from the home of his brother-in-law and guardian, at Cooperstown, N. Y., and went to New York City, secured from Governor Clinton, a letter to Secretary of War, John C. Calhoun, to the effect that he was a son of Gen. Samuel B. Webb, and that Clinton knew him to be of good character. Armed with the letter, which Clinton protested would do the youngster more harm than good, he went to Washington, and after, what at first threatened to be a flat refusal to give him a commission in the army, by sheer force of his boyish manliness, Calhoun gave him the commission, as a lieutenant, in the fourth battalion of Artillery, with orders to report at Governor's Island, in New York Harbor. In August, 1819, he reported for duty there, and there he remained until fall, when ambitious to plunge into the wilderness and learn at first hand what he might about the Indians and his country in that wilderness state, he secured a transfer to Detroit, and to the Infantry. Afterwards, in June, 1821, Webb was sent to Fort Dearborn, the place he most coveted, then commanded by Colonel John Mc Neil. Here Webb was appointed adjutant of the post. In the last days of January, 1822, Mr. Kinzie, the Indian agent, reported to the commandant that a friendly Pottawatomie chief had brought to him a piece of tobacco, sent the latter by the Sioux Indians, with an invitation to his tribe to join them in cutting off the fifth regiment of Infantry, then stationed at the Falls of St. Anthony, and occupying only temporary huts, but in the full reliance of friendly feelings from the Sioux. It was well known that Col. Snelling, and his command, with their women and children, were in a very exposed condition, and there was no doubt of the accuracy of Kinzie's information, and the gravest anxiety prevailed in Chicago for their safety. The adjutant, Webb, was called and ordered to find a person willing to carry a letter. In the dead of winter, and 180 miles from any inhabitants, Col. McNeil expressed his unwillingness to order anyone on so perilous a trip, and with his own weak garrison, he feared to part with any considerable numbers. With the possibility of an abandonment of the undertaking, Webb volunteered, and made the trip. The revised (by Webb) biography of Webb, informs us that he reached Ft. Armstrong on the evening of the fourth day, which differs from Webb's statements. This biography sets the date of his early morning departure from La Saller's cabin at two o'clock of the eighth of February, his 20th birthday, and eight o'clock, as the hour when the Winnebagoes started to capture his party. It was three o'clock when he crossed Rock River. Major Burbank commanded at Fort Armstrong, and he was profuse in his praises of the bravery of Webb.

Other authorities tell us that after Webb's departure, La Sallier (so spelled here) sent word by a friendly Indian to Ft. Dearborn, that Webb had fortlily taken to the prairie and was pursued by a war party of Winnebagoes, who could not fail to overtake and destroy the party. Acting upon this intelligence, the next monthly post bulletin contained this notation, that Webb and his sergeant had been "killed by the Indians." In 1825, he was made Adjutant of the Third regiment. In September, 1827, he resigned his commission, and in December, of the same year, he became the proprietor





JOSIAH SNELLING



FORT SNELLING

and editor of the New York Morning Courier. In 1829, he bought the Enquirer, and he consolidated the two papers under the name Courier-Enquirer. In the newspaper field he was as daring as he had been in the army, and he was progressive to the point of being called reckless. Desiring to get his European news before his rivals, he looked with contempt on the row boats collecting it before the ships docked, so he hired a fast schooner, the Eclipse, and sent it, with smaller boats, after the news, with the result that he compelled all the other New York papers to do the same. When they had caught up, Webb had built for himself a remarkably fast clipper-schooner, and again he put his rivals to confusion by getting all the news first. After this conquest, he turned his attention to Washington, and by a pony express he became enabled to scoop his rivals on Washington news. With this advantage, the other papers were compelled to buy their news from him. To his news service he brought the same enterprise he manifested while plowing his way across the bleak snow covered prairies of Illinois.

As might be surmised, Webb's pen was quite as aggressive as his physical person, as many were reminded especially, Thomas F. Marshall with whom he fought at ten paces, and with pistols. Marshall's second fire sent a bullet into Webb's knee. But that was not all. A statute existed in New York, forbidding persons from leaving the state to fight a duel. This statute, Webb ignored, because it always had been treated as a dead letter, and he went to a point near Wilmington, in Delaware, to hold the meeting. His enemies procured his indictment, and under his plea of guilty with a justification, he was sentenced to two years in the penitentiary. A friendly governor, however, came to the rescue and pardoned him. This sentence Horace Greeley seized later, and made excellent use of it in replying to an unwarranted attack made upon him by Webb, in the columns of his paper. Greeley's caustic reply annihilated Webb, and closed the incident forever.

At the same time he was a man of strong friendships, and among those friends he numbered no less a person than the Emperor Louis Napoleon, who, when exiled to this country, found in Webb a sturdy and reliable friend. This friendship he used to excellent advantage with Louis Napoleon, when Lincoln and his cabinet wanted to secure the withdrawal of French troops from Mexico. At a breakfast with the Emperor, Webb secured a pledge, which obviated a disagreeable diplomatic correspondence and pursuant to the breakfast agreement, the troops were withdrawn. Lincoln always felt grateful to Webb for his successes while minister to Brazil, when that monarchy was doing all that it could to help the south. Webb's conduct was so prompt and admittedly so vigorous, that he stopped British activities there, and when he demanded his passports, the Brazilian government backed down from its position of impudence and apologized. Such a man was Webb, whose biography contains some most dramatic chapters, particularly the Cilly-Graves duel, which Webb seems to have been responsible for, and whose conduct presented some of the rarest instances of patriotism. The man positively feared nothing.

But one other man should have for us an interest even greater than our

interest in Webb. (You must surely guess that La Sallier is meant.) First, Le Seller may be the proper way to spell it.

From the "Narrative of an Expedition to the Source of St. Peter's River, (etc.)," compiled by William H. Keating, from the notes of Major S. H. Long and of Messrs Say, Keating and Colhoun, considerable light is thrown on La Sallier. On June 11, 1823, (Vol. 1, p. 175) when the expedition, then at Chicago, had decided to select a route to Galena, rather than to Fort Armstrong, no person could be found to guide it along that route, until "an old French engage, of the name, Le Seller" undertook to direct it. "This man," says Keating, "who had lived for upwards of thirty years with the Indians, had taken a wife among the Winnebagoes, and settled on the headwaters of Rock River; knowing the country as far as that stream, he presumed that he could find his way thence to Fort Crawford."

This information tallies with the information disclosed in the correspondence between Robert Dickson and John Lawe, found in the 11th volume of the Wisconsin Historical Society's collections, which shows plainly that he was found during the war with England, in 1813-14-15, around Lake Winnebago, where Dickson could put his finger on him at almost any minute when wanted. And if he had lived there many years, it would indicate that he moved to the Grand Detour country after the year 1815, and if, when the Long expedition went across the state, he had abandoned the Lee county residence, then the length of his residence there is conjectural, unless there were two La Salliers, which is not true. He could not have lived in Lee county long after the year 1822 because John Dixon came to Dixon in 1830 to live, and at that time there was no La Sallier there. And in 1835, when Joseph Crawford surveyed the neighborhood, the cabin had rotted into a mass of sticks and mold. It is difficult to imagine how, in so short a time, a solid log cabin could push itself into a state of decay, unless it had burned, and inasmuch as the stones, now on the mound where it stood, wear the appearance of having been subjected to fire, the cabin must have burned.

La Sallier guided the party safely until the Pektannos (Pecatonica) river had been reached, a few miles above its mouth. At this point La Sallier informed the party that the Sauks pronounced the diminutive of a word by adding a hissing sound. La Sallier must have been an observing man, and one of some information! At this point, too, it became evident that he had reached the limit of his knowledge of the country. Accordingly, he was sent ahead to secure an Indian to act as guide for the rest of the journey to Prairie du Chien. The elder brother of the chief of the village to which La Sallier went, a so-called Sauk, was secured. La Sallier explained his mission, and the Indians, mostly Winnebagoes, received the party with manifestations of friendship. The new guide's name was Wanebea. On page 194 of the book, La Sallier is credited with translating certain words uttered by a Winnebago into the Sauk language; then into French; then into English, in order to test the accuracy of some of the vocabulary which Major Long had written during a former trip. This work, La Sallier did with surprising accuracy.

During the remainder of the trip to Prairie du Chien, La Sallier is cred-

ited with communicating much valuable information about the Sauks, useful to any student of ethnology, (p. 223). La Sallier, too, expressed a singular regard for the decencies of conversation, because, when listening to an interpretation of some of the things concerning squaws, which had been detailed in a revolting manner, the old fellow blushed; "which, with a Canadian trader, might be supposed not to be an easy thing." Thus it will be seen, by this parting allusion to La Sallier, that at Grand Detour, close to which on the farm of Eugene Harrington, of Dixon, his cabin was located, he was a Canadian trader. At Prairie du Chien, in the summer of 1823, is the last view, written history gives us of the Illinois activities of this first settler, whose parting information was to interpret Waneba's discourse on the soul and the spirit.

Gurdon Hubbard, who came to Illinois and settled in 1818, made a slight reference to this old trader's home near Grand Detour by saying, it was on Rock River at that time.

The letters from Robert Dickson to John Lawe, in 1813-14-15, during our second war with England, and printed in the 10th and 11th volumes of the Wisconsin Historical collections, shed much light on La Sallier. The position of Dickson particularly while at Prairie du Chien is too well known to need comment and these letters would indicate that La Sallier sided with Dickson and the British. Dickson uniformly refers to him as Mr. La Sallier and in every instance he speaks well of him. The statement in the Long book, that he had lived many years at the headwaters of Rock River, would seem by these letters to be borne out.

On December 9, 1813, Dickson wrote to Lawe, who was at La Baie: "I will write you tomorrow by Mr. La Sallier. Try to procure two horses to go to Millwackee and return." This would indicate that La Sallier, at that date was at Lake Winnebago, and as letters then were sent by messenger, it would seem that La Sallier was to be the messenger to carry the letter of tomorrow. The same with December 30, 1813, because Dickson says: "I wrote you last night by my men. This will be handed you by Mr. La Saliers, who goes to Millwackee. You will please deliver to him two kegs gunpowder, 50 lbs each, two bags ball and one bale of carrot tobacco as I know you will be short of that article. Endeavor to send him off as soon as possible. Nothing further occurs to me at present."

January 20, 1814, in a letter carried by Thomas Carron, or Old Tomah, in which Dickson expresses his needs repeatedly and also forwards a quantity of gossip, he says: "Mr. La Saliers is an excellent hand at the great guns." At about this time Dickson complains of being in a dangerous situation from the Americans and the Indians, and so this reference to guns is expressive.

On February 10, 1814, Robert Dickson, writing from Lake Winnebago to Lieutenant John Lawe, had this to say: "I enclose you the letter I send Chandonnet, for your perusal. You will please get Collish and Jean Vieux, two brothers-in-law, to go to Milwaukee with the letter; and they will proceed to where Le Sallier is and bring him here. They must inform the Indians that I want Le Sallier to tell him the news to carry back to them

at some time. You will instruct the Indians to listen to all that is going on where they pass, and bring me a faithful report. These two Indians are related to La Farine and another chief and they are the most fit to be entrusted with the commission."

In a letter dated at Winnebago Lake, February 11, 1814, Dickson wrote to Lawe at La Baye about six Pottowatomies, who had just arrived and which he suspected of being spies; he ordered them off when they gave him two letters conveying the information that the Americans had captured all the traders on the south side of Lake Michigan and taken them to Detroit. After saying that he will detain them, he adds: "If no party appears tomorrow, I shall send them (six Indians) off clothed, on account of their doing mischief to Chandonnet. I cannot learn what is become of Le Sallier. Chandonnet has not seen him since he came from La Baye."

On February 14, 1814, Dickson sent his letter by two Indians to La Bay, where they were going anyway to get their axes mended: "The six Indians went off yesterday. I am convinced that they were sent by some one employed by the Americans. I have discovered that the Grand Puant, a Poutewatamie, Mr. Saliers' friend, came here with an intention of cutting us off, but his heart failed him when he requested me that his young men should dance. Then I refused. He had previously to his setting out from his lodge, sent round tobacco to the young people about Millwackee to come here with him to dance."

L. Grignon writes to Dickson, from La Bay, on February 28, 1815. Dickson was at Prairie du Chien and Grignon comments on the state of war: "Mr. La Salieres has not yet given us any news more than what I have mentioned."

March 9, 1814, Dickson wrote that: "Pierre Le Claire arrived here two days ago and brought me a letter from La Salieres, of 3rd inst. L' Chandonnet had left Millwackee five days prior to that & must be near La Baye, if not arrived."

One other letter would indicate that La Sallier had been at Peoria and it would seem to contradict the possibility that the old fellow had lived near Grand Detour for many years.

Prof. James D. Butler, in writing for the Wisconsin Historical society about the Four Lakes country, says of Le Sellier, on page 72, volume 10: "Regarding the attractiveness of the Four Lake country to Frenchmen long ago, I have met with an unexpected fact which countenances my theory, that Frenchmen made their way to this nook of paradise at a very early date. Since commencing this paper I have fallen in with the name of one Frenchman who was no doubt on the Four Lakes before Arnel was born and possibly made his home here. This man's name was Le Sellier, the French for Saddler, an old French engage, who was enlisted by Major Long as a guide in 1823, from Chicago to Prairie du Chien, 'because he had lived over thirty years with the Indians, had taken a Winnebago wife, and settled on the headwaters of Rock River.' Le Sellier's dwelling is as likely to have been on Mendota as on Koshkonong—and that one hundred years ago. It is more

than sixty years since he served as Long's guide, and he already had been in this country more than thirty years." (By reference to a French dictionary, Sellier is pronounced Sallier, as in "there," which account for spelling the name Sallier, perhaps. It may be added here, too, that the statement made by Dixon, Illinois, parties that La Sallier's daughter was Madeline Ogee, is untrue.)

This statement about Lake Mendota is scarcely tenable, however, when all the authorities at present known, have been examined. Koshkonong is right.

In the glamour of this history and the traditions following, I have lived for nearly seventy years, and so, when this Webb story came to me there came with it a tugging at my heart strings to give it the light of day, so far as I might, which I did first in 1914, when I wrote for a Chicago publishing house, a history of Lee County, Illinois.

In repeating this plain and simple story of Webb's, you should have it just as Webb himself has told it. To turn it over to the laboratory of the specialist to ask why, in the first place, the Indian failed to exercise his instinct, rather than wait and freeze awhile, after his companions had left him, would rob the story of its vitality. History needs no refining process or commercial veneer. Webb's painful journey pictures to us topmost speed in the plodding period of our civilization, and as events disclosed, that speed was sufficient to head off the Sioux raid and the probable massacre of Snelling and his command to the last man, woman and child.

In the short cut methods of 1924, we would step to the telephone, get Long Distance, and then Colonel Snelling, when something like this would be said: "Hello, Colonel Snelling? This is Colonel McNeil at Fort Dearborn. The Sioux are planning to murder your command. Look out. Yes, I'll hold the wire. So you have the conspiring chiefs in the guardhouse? That's fine! My compliments." You would get speed, but you would lose a lesson in heroism, worth all the speed extant. Perhaps, too, in the next 102 years the telephone incident may prove just as uninteresting for its droning pace.

I became interested in this story because the La Sallier cabin stood in my native county of Lee, and near my native city of Dixon, where hovers the nimbus of many a rare historic scene and of many a fair tradition.

Dixon, and its cross-lots trail from southern Illinois to the lead mines, killed the business of the keel boat as a means of transportation up and down the Mississippi. At Dixon the troops took their bearings while on their march northward to help suppress the Red Bird insurrection or Winnebago war of 1827. Along the broad highway, marked by Oliver W. Kellogg in 1827, Abraham Lincoln traveled while in his first public service in the Black Hawk war. At Dixon's Ferry Lincoln wrote his first document of an official nature. It was a requisition for a few muskets for his company, written on the back of an old envelope of the times. At Dixon, Jefferson Davis, a second lieutenant in the same service, enjoyed, with his superior officer, Zachary Taylor, his first exploit in military affairs—two presidents of the United States and the president of the southern confederacy! A short while there—

after, Winfield Scott came to Dixon, with his aid, Joseph E. Johnston, and there we have a candidate for the presidency on the whig ticket and a great southern general. With Atkinson came Albert Sidney Johnston, another of the great southern generals. G. H. Browning, too, later a secretary of the Interior. There the career of most of them was begun.

In 1879 I was permitted to visit the historic spots of Illinois: Fort Chartres, Prairie Du Rocher, Cahokia, Kaskaskia, then intact. I saw the Morrison house, the Edgar house in which La Fayette was entertained in 1825, the General Cox house, in which, we are told, the first constitutional convention was held; Fort Massac; Shawneetown, with all its points of interest; Starved Rock, and Ft. Clark, but back at Dixon their significance was overshadowed by the footprints of deeds begun by Lincoln, whose fame can be overshadowed by nothing mortal.

Of Dixon's fame, Charles Fenno Hoffman, to whom Webb dedicated his story, has sung it in his *Winter in the West*. To it Mrs. Kinzie added the lustre of her Waubun and Margaret Fuller Ossoli and William Cullen Bryant, and for the privilege of adding my mite in the story of La Salle, full of charm and interest to me, but dull perhaps to the reader, I am thankful.

Note 1: In applying the Webb route to present boundaries, Blanchard, in his historical map, traced it from Chicago to Wheaton; thence dropping a little to the south to Batavia; thence westerly through De Kalb county about three miles south of De Kalb; thence through the northern part of Lee county, about two or three miles below the north boundary to La Salle's; thence westerly about three miles north of Dixon to Fulton, and thence down the river to Ft. Armstrong.

Note 2: It has been said, by some authorities, that Webb's Washington pony express service cost him \$7,500 a month. Horses were changed every six miles.

Note 3: In various books the names of post commandants have been given otherwise, and so, to establish the truthfulness of my statements, a letter from the War office is attached:

"The records of this office show that in February, 1822, the commanding officer of Fort Dearborn, Illinois, was Brevet Colonel John McNeil, 3rd Infantry, and that the garrison consisted of 9 officers and 91 enlisted men; and that the commanding officer of Fort Armstrong, Illinois, was Brevet Major Sullivan Burbank, 5th Infantry, and the garrison consisted of 6 officers and 51 enlisted men.

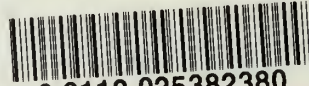
"The earliest record in this office of Fort St. Anthony, which, in 1825, became Fort Snelling, Minnesota, is August, 1822. The commanding officer at that time was Colonel Josiah Snelling, 5th Infantry, and the garrison consisted of 10 officers and 274 enlisted men. It appears that this post was occupied by U. S. troops continuously from 1822 to present date, with the exception of the period of 1858 to 1866."

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA

977.3ST4J1969

C001

JAMES WATSON WEBB'S TRIP ACROSS ILLINOIS



3 0112 025382380